

DRM
PP 1-3

D'Amato's Pothole Politics and Paper Trails

By Jim McGee
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato says he made a promise to the people of New York when he ran for the Senate in 1980: "Elect me, I'll fight for you."

He has been true to his word. During his 10 years in the Senate,

the Long Island Republican has used a blunt, outta-my-way style in helping corporations, campaign contributors and constituents alike.

Pork-barrel politics and political leveraging are nothing new in Washington. But D'Amato's intensity at playing the game has attracted unwanted attention, including an ethics investigation.

"I'm very aggressive by nature," he said. "It goes to the essence of what I'm about."

Ask the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority. It does not usually hear from U.S. senators about the millions of dollars awarded to subcontractors each year. In 1987, as the agency was

buying 200 new subway cars, D'Amato sent a letter singling out a prospective subcontractor, the Westinghouse Air Brake Co. of Yonkers, N.Y.

Ask the National Park Service. In 1988, it awarded a multimillion-dollar concession for the ferry service to the Statue of Liberty. D'Amato fired off a letter on behalf of the losing company, a Manhattan firm owned by a campaign contributor. "What federal policy goals are being advanced here?" D'Amato's letter demanded.

Ask the Long Island Rail Road. It saw no need to renovate an aban-

See D'AMATO, A16, Col. 1

The Washington Post
APRIL 22, 1990
PP. 1 & 16

206A-NY-189824-35

SEARCHED <i>EF</i>	INDEXED <i>EF</i>
SERIALIZED <i>EF</i>	FILED <i>EF</i>
MAY 01 1990	

b6
b7C

New York Senator's Aggressive Style Generates Praise and Scorn

D'Amato said several times during two interviews that he does not recall ever being lobbied by his brother, although he said clients might hire Armand with that thought in mind. But the senator said, "If they go [to Armand] because they think they're getting something extra, they are not."

Armand D'Amato declined to be interviewed. In Long Island he is considered a politically influential attorney in his own right; he served five terms in the state Assembly and formed a law firm known for its expertise in land use and development matters.

Sen. D'Amato said he knows of only one occasion when his brother contacted his office on behalf of a client; the call involved a contract for the Unisys Corp., a New York-based major defense contractor. D'Amato said the call was handled by his staff and he learned about it only much later.

Unisys was seeking a \$100 million contract to provide computers for the Aegis missile defense system. In 1986, Congress required the Navy to hold an open competition for the contract, but by November 1987, the Navy had not held the competition and Unisys was impatient.

During this period, Unisys retained Armand D'Amato's law firm "to monitor issues of interest to Unisys before the Congress and the Department of Defense," according to a Unisys spokesman, and paid a \$35,000 fee to the law firm.

At some point, Armand D'Amato contacted the senator's office and suggested that the senator send a letter to then-Navy Secretary James Webb inquiring about the status of the competition. A Dec. 1 letter bearing Sen. D'Amato's signature asked when the Aegis contract would be put out for competitive bidding. It did not mention Unisys by name, but Unisys was the principal bidder and eventually won the contract.



D'Amato on charges at Senate ethics panel: "Look at any one of [them] and show me what we have done that is wrong."

"You get these letters from everyone imaginable," Webb said. "So it really doesn't suggest anything to me other than the guy's trying to put pressure on us to make a decision. To me it was sort of boilerplate."

Asking Pointed Questions

Whatever the outcome of the ethics inquiry, recent interviews and D'Amato's many letters to government agencies illustrate his penchant for plunging ahead on behalf of aggrieved constituents.

One example is New York marine developer Stephen Sloan, who came in second on a 1988 bid to provide ferry service to the Statue of Lib-

erty and turned to the New York congressional delegation for help. Three congressmen signed a low-key memo asking for an explanation; a fourth filed a protest to the General Accounting Office.

D'Amato, however, fired off a personal letter to the service's director asking a series of pointed questions. "I never thought I'd get a letter like that out of a U.S. senator," Sloan said.

Sloan had contributed three times to D'Amato's campaign since 1985, including a \$1,000 donation recorded two weeks after he lost the bid competition. In addition, he had retained Armand D'Amato for legal work on a marina-condominium project. "So what," Sen.

D'Amato said. "There are . . . some questions that a citizen raises. A CITIZEN! It doesn't matter if it's Citizen Sloan, who contributed to me, or not."

D'Amato also writes to officials who are in positions to influence the awarding of bids on federally funded projects. Often, as in the case of letters to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), he is writing to an administrator who regularly seeks his help on Capitol Hill. D'Amato is ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on transportation and related agencies.

In March 1987, for example, D'Amato wrote to MTA Chairman Robert Kiley saying that he was

"aware that the Westinghouse Air Brake Company" of Yonkers was among the prospective subcontractors to build 200 subway cars—or would be if a prime contractor held an open competition. Kiley declined to intervene. "If MTA were to intrude upon the prime contractor's discretion to award the subcontracts" there could be legal problems, he told D'Amato. "We could not, however, and will not insist that prime contractors select any particular vendor."

A year later, D'Amato wrote Kiley about another contract. "I am writing in strong support of a bid by General Railway Signal of Rochester, N.Y., on a \$10 million project to upgrade the signal system at New York's Grand Central Terminal," he wrote, noting that two other competitors were foreign-owned.

'Advocate for the People'

D'Amato said he is just doing his job. "You could ask the question: 'Should we send any letters of support for anyone in our state?'" he said. "I was elected to be an advocate for the people, for the interests, for the communities of our state. The businesses, et cetera. The totality of our state. And that's what I've done here."

DelliBovi said his old friend's style of politics has been good for New York. "We've always had one senator [Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan] who was up there, the statesman, the international philosopher," he said. "That was part of the rationale for Alfonse's election in the first place. Moynihan was the professor . . . and it was about time we had one senator who was attending to—you know, 'The Pot-hole Senator,' taking care of things," he said.

"Those were the rules of the game. The game may be changing. The rules may be changing."

Staff researcher Lucy Shackelford contributed to this report.